



## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY POLICIES & PROCEDURES



POLICY NUMBER	
OPR:24	
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**SUBJECT: PEER/OFFICER SUPPORT TEAM**

### 1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the Peer/Officer Support Team (POST) for the Department of Public Safety.

### 2.0 POLICY

It is the policy of the Department of Public Safety to establish a POST program to help mitigate any adverse impact of a critical incident. The goal of the POST Program is to provide a process in which stress and emotions resulting from a critical incident may be vented in a controlled setting and to provide information to assist employees with stress management and referral resources.

### 3.0 APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all employees of the Department of Public Safety.

### 4.0 REFERENCES

#### A. CALEA Standards Chapter 22 - Compensations, Benefits and Conditions of Work

### 5.0 DEFINITIONS

- A. **Peer/Officer Support Team (POST)** – The Peer / Officer Support Team (POST) will be comprised of departmental employees selected and trained to support, give guidance or refer employees in need of psychological counseling or assistance for work related issues and/or personal problems. The acronym “POST” will be used throughout this document.
- B. **Critical Incident** – Any extraordinary occurrence or traumatic duty-related event that causes trauma and/or stress for a DPS employee. This shall include, but not be limited to: shooting incidents, multiple death accidents, disasters, vehicle accidents or a significant personal threat.
- C. **Debriefing** – A confidential, structured meeting which is facilitated by a POST Commander and a mental health professional. The meeting allows participants to share their reactions to the high stress incident and to vent their emotions. POST members may provide feedback about possible reactions and symptoms, which are normal to unusual events, as well as referral information. The debriefing is not a critique of the incident.
- D. **POST Member** – A DPS employee trained in listening and assessment skills that respond to department or employee requests for help and/or referral to professional assistance or psychological services.

- E. POST Commander** – A DPS employee selected by the Deputy Secretary and trained in POST intervention. The POST Commander will supervise the team and coordinate training and response with the contract Psychologist.
- F. Defusing** – Occurs during or immediately after a major critical incident by stabilizing individuals emotionally or stabilizing potentially emotionally-charged situations.
- G. POST Psychologist** – A psychologist licensed by the State of New Mexico and contracted by the DPS.
- H. Mental Health Professional (MHP)** – A person who has at least a Masters Degree in a behavioral science e.g. psychology or clinical social work, with an emphasis on counseling, crisis intervention and traumatic stress education.
- I. Removal** – POST members serve at the discretion of the Deputy Secretary and may be removed at any time.
- J. Demobilization** – Quick informal rest session that serves as a screening opportunity to assure that individuals who may need assistance are identified early after the traumatic event.
- K. Deputy Secretary** – The DPS Deputy Secretary of Operations-Chief of the State Police.
- L. DPS** – The Department of Public Safety.

## **6.0 PROCEDURE**

### **A. POST Commander Responsibilities:**

1. The POST Commander is responsible for the overall administration of the POST Program that includes but is not limited to:
  - a. Overseeing the selection process of POST members and POST Supervisors.
  - b. Coordinating required training for POST members.
  - c. Determining whether confidentiality will be breached or maintained when POST members encounter circumstances of a serious nature which require direction/advice.
  - d. Screening requests for POST member services from other agencies and determine response.
  - e. Consult with POST psychologist regarding individuals who may require referral for additional support and / or counseling.
2. Mandatory POST Notification
  - a. The POST Commander or his/her designee shall be notified by the critical incident on-scene commander whenever the following occurs:
    1. Any line of duty death.

2. Any incident in which action taken by or against a department employee results in death or serious physical injury.
  3. Any shooting incident involving a department employee except for the killing of severely injured animals or accidental weapon discharge.
  4. **Any perception by supervisor or affected employees of a significant threat to self or others.**
  5. Any department motor vehicle, aircraft/watercraft incident or crash which results in death or serious physical injury.
  6. Any incident involving multiple deaths.
  7. Any suicide involving a department employee.
3. Discretionary POST Notification
- a. The POST Commander or his/her designee may be notified by any supervisor or POST member whenever the following occurs:
    1. Prolonged or violent tactical operations.
    2. Other stressful situations, depending on the needs of the employees involved.
    3. Any incident deemed serious enough by the magnitude of the circumstances.
4. Activation Procedures/Critical Incident
- a. The POST Commander or his/her designee shall be notified by the critical incident on-scene commander of the need to deploy a POST member.
  - b. The Headquarters Duty Officer may also advise the POST Commander or his/her designee as to the nature of the critical incident.
  - c. The POST Commander or his/her designee will communicate with the critical incident on-scene commander to evaluate the need for POST services.
  - d. The POST Commander or his/her designee will:
    1. Determine if a defusing or debriefing is needed.
    2. Initiate contact of POST members and coordinate with their appropriate supervisor(s) in order to facilitate on scene action.
    3. Contact the supervisor in charge of the investigation or incident or the on-scene incident commander to coordinate on-scene defusing or debriefing.
    4. Determine the number of POST members needed for a particular incident. Activation of all or part of the POST may depend upon the type and scope of the incident and the number of employees involved.
5. Activation Procedure/Peer Support
- a. Any employee may contact any POST member to seek guidance, assistance

or referral.

6. Debriefings

- a. Participation in debriefings is voluntary for the affected employee.
- b. Debriefings will normally be held within three days of the incident.
- c. A mental health professional shall be present for a debriefing.

7. Defusing

- a. Participation in defusing is voluntary for the affected employee.
- b. Defusing will normally be held within 8 hours of an incident.
- c. Defusing is aimed at the core working group most seriously affected by the incident.

8. POST Member Selection/Removal

- a. All DPS employees are eligible to apply for membership to the POST.
- b. The POST Commander will solicit applicants by publishing announcements in various department media e.g. teletype, IDC.
- c. Applicants who express interest in POST membership must have written recommendations from their immediate and second level supervisors. The POST Commander will select the applicants and forward their names to the Deputy Secretary for final approval.
- d. POST members can be removed at the discretion of the Deputy Secretary.

9. Training Requirements

- a. The POST Commander or his/her designee will coordinate training for all POST members.
- b. POST members are required to attend basic Critical Incident Stress Management training prior to responding to a critical incident pursuant to this policy.
- c. POST members will also participate in other training including, but not limited to; listening skills and confidentiality issues.

10. Assignments

- a. Prior to responding to any incident, the POST commander will notify the POST members who will notify their immediate supervisors.
- b. Requests for POST services from other agencies or individuals will be directed to POST Commander for disposition.

11. Confidentiality Guidelines

- a. Confidentiality will be maintained to protect the identity of employees and content of any contact by a member of the POST. However, confidentiality may not be absolute because of the seriousness of a circumstance or legal requirement.
- b. While every reasonable effort to protect anonymity should be taken by the team member, there are confidentiality exceptions to the department's confidentiality policy.
- c. Confidentiality Exceptions;
  - 1. When any crime has been committed.
  - 2. When circumstances indicated those being assisted are in danger or pose a threat to themselves or others.
  - 3. Or otherwise provided by law.
- d. Breach of Confidentiality Consequences Compromising a confidence for any reason other than stated in the Confidentiality Exceptions will be considered a violation of department policy and the POST member is subject to removal by the Deputy Secretary.
- e. Breach of Confidentiality - Non-Emergency - Whenever a POST member believes that a confidentiality exception is present the member will contact the POST Commander and provide a briefing on the circumstances of the situation. If, in the judgment of the POST Commander, immediate attention is required the member will disclose all information about the situation including the identity of the employee or individual(s) involved.
- f. The POST Commander will initiate appropriate steps to resolve the matter. If, in the judgment of the POST Commander, a confidentiality exception is not present, the matter will be considered confidential and will go no further.
- g. Breach of Confidentiality - Emergency. If a POST member becomes aware of an emergency situation (**i.e. danger to self or others**) involving a confidentiality exception and the POST Commander cannot be immediately contacted, the member will contact a qualified department supervisor or commander and disclose all information.

## **7.0 ATTACHMENTS**

**NONE**

## **8.0 APPROVAL**

APPROVED BY: s/John Denko  
DPS Cabinet Secretary

DATE: January 4, 2010